

## Arab Reform Bulletin: April 2008

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## Insights and Analysis

### Women's Political Participation in the Gulf: A Conversation with Activists Fatin Bundagji (Saudi Arabia), Rola Dashti (Kuwait), and Munira Fakhro (Bahrain)

#### What are the obstacles to greater political activism by women in the Gulf?

**Dashti:** There are many interlinked factors related to the religious and social environment as well as the attitude of political leaders, who have not taken a clear position: should women have a role in public life, private life only, or a mix of the two? In the Gulf, there is a conflict between a modernizing and development-oriented perspective and a religious-tribal perspective. The latter fights to keep women at home and preserve the traditional arrangement of male domination of the public sphere and female limitation to the private sphere. Men have succeeded in the public sphere to the extent that they are giving up their roles at home. The modernizing perspective promotes a partnership between men and women in public life, and citizenship rights and duties for both. The struggle between these two trends remains unresolved, and here the third force appears—the government role—which is unstable and swings back and forth, one day siding with the modernizers and the next day with religious and tribal elements. The media also can play an important role in this struggle by showing women in leadership roles.

**Bundagji:** The problem lies in raising and reshaping awareness, and here we have to go back to education, the importance of concentrating on the concept of citizenship and the rights and duties inherent in it, and on the cause of women's rights and their role in public life.

As for the media in Saudi Arabia, they are very good and play a positive role regarding women's problems and issues. They publicized, for example, the "Girl of Qatif" case (a rape victim initially sentenced to lashing and later pardoned by King Abdullah), as well as that of the businesswoman who drank a cup of coffee with a colleague at Starbucks and was arrested by the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice.

**Fakhro:** First, we must reform education, because men and women learn from the same state-provided curricula. Second, there must be reform on the level of *ijtihad* (interpretation) of the holy Quran; there must be modernization and development to suit the age and time. Morocco achieved an important accomplishment in this regard, namely the new family law (Moudawana), through a modern interpretation of the Quran. Turkey and Iran also have experiences from which we can benefit. We should not restrict ourselves to only Arab societies.

Our problem is the lack of seriousness of decision makers—who are tribalists and dictators—and their interest in maintaining the status quo. There is also the fact that society links men's honor with women's bodies, and so men are careful to keep women behind the walls of the home.

### What is the impact of economic factors on women's political participation?

**Dashti:** Women's participation in the economies of the Gulf is growing; they now comprise 30-40 percent of the workforce. Their jobs have become necessary to support a family, but unfortunately women's economic situation has not propelled them to seek high-ranking political offices. Despite their economic capabilities, women still are not economic decision-makers, even though there is no religious dispute over the right of women to manage their money.

There is also economic violence against women in the Gulf, through men's control over women's money. In some cases men give women an allowance out of the women's own money, which of course weakens their independence. As if it were not enough that the woman is confined to her role at home, and then that the man has abandoned his role at home, now the man is taking control of her money!

**Bundagji:** There is a strong link between women's political participation and economic development. Women's participation in the decision-making process is necessary to ensure proper and balanced strategic planning that takes into account the social and economic needs of Saudi women. A recent report said that some 60 percent of female college graduates in Saudi Arabia do not get jobs, even though the state is investing heavily in educating women. This means that the economy is losing a lot by not benefiting from these female graduates. It is true that working women have a prominent presence in teaching and nursing, but they are absent from most sectors.

**Fakhro:** Since women have been permitted to work in other Gulf Cooperation Council countries, many Saudi women—most of them from the Eastern Province—have traveled to Kuwait and worked for very low salaries to escape from the bad situation in Saudi Arabia. They also went to work in Dubai at the invitation of its ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid.

In Bahrain, although many women have obtained much economic power through inheritance, they do not utilize the situation to their benefit. Many of them make husbands, sons, or older brothers their proxies, though some of them have been freed from this pattern.

**Bundagji:** Women in Saudi Arabia make up only 7 percent of the labor market. Even when women assume leadership positions in Saudi Arabia, they lack real decision-making powers. There are 150 men in the Shura Council and only six part-time female advisors. If I were one of them I would not have accepted the position, because it has no powers. There are 170 municipal councils, without a single woman member. The number of women in Saudi Arabia equals that of men, yet no woman can drive. Setting aside the question of a woman's right to drive, consider the economic implications and how costly it is for a woman to hire a foreign driver.

**Fakhro:** Saudi Arabia is holding back the whole region. Because it is a country with weight, and the largest in terms of population and area, it affects the progress of the other Gulf countries. The late King Faisal imposed women's education by force. He was a reformer and powerful, but now the rulers do not want to educate their peoples nor do they want reform.

Women in Bahrain make up about 30 percent of the workforce, but they have not yet reached equality with men. In Bahrain, women head universities, professional associations, and civil organizations—elected by men. The women's rights' cause is very strong in Bahrain. There is a large opening for Bahrainis compared to their neighbors.

### Do you support quotas for women's political representation?

**Bundagji:** I support quotas.

**Fakhro:** As do I. It should be political parties, however, who implement quotas, as in France, where women make up 50 percent of the candidate slates. The quota by this means is better and fairer.

**Dashti:** I think that the quota need not be limited to legislative councils but also should apply to the executive bodies and councils, because that is where decision-making happens. Such a quota would be an important tool to abolish laws and other measures that marginalize women. Upon taking decision-making positions, women must work to achieve that.

**Bundagji:** But the quota can be a double-edged sword. What can guarantee us that women chosen by quota represent the majority of women, or reflect the diversity of society? The quota is useful as long as it achieves the goal of true representation of society.

**Fakhro:** The problem is that the decision to implement a quota is a government one, and the government will try to exploit the women representatives who owe their positions to it. Unfortunately there are women, for example female ministers, who carry out government decisions against women. They are placed in leadership positions simply to preserve the state's reputation before the West, not out of a belief in women's participation.

### What are the most important goals for women in your countries now?

**Dashti:** Strengthening genuine participation for women in decision-making positions, a media alliance to highlight the role of women and their presence in public life, and supporting and developing young female leaders.

**Fakhro:** I dream that there will be more women in decision-making positions and the integration of women into political life—that future generations will have what we did not have.

**Bundagji:** Saudi women need to guarantee their civil rights first. There must be educational reform, the integration of women into the basic service institutions and the chambers of commerce and municipal councils. If women are able to achieve that, they will be able to be in contact with the different levels of society. Another priority issue is stopping violence against children, a cause adopted by women, but we need specialized courts and understanding judges.

Women are an emerging informal power in Saudi Arabia and are changing the status quo. They are taking on the issue of obesity, for example, a major problem in the country. From a health perspective, defeating obesity requires exercise. Taking good health as a starting point, women are campaigning for walking as exercise, and this gives them a new public presence and freedom of movement. Similarly, women are demanding to drive. Ultimately, we hope that change will come through women themselves.

*This interview was conducted by Michele Dunne and translated from Arabic by Paul Wulfsberg.*

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### Egypt: Local Elections...the End of the Democratic Spring

#### ***Khalil al-Anani***

The local elections to be held on April 8 confirm the continuing authoritarian hegemony over political life in Egypt, despite talk of new thinking and democratic transformation. The National Democratic Party (NDP) has insisted on monopolizing the electoral process by excluding other political forces' candidates, whether those of the (outlawed) Muslim Brotherhood or of the legal opposition parties. Interventions in the electoral process have included complicating or delaying electoral procedures as well as arresting, expelling, or intimidating many candidates. Unfortunately, the law regulating elections (Law 43/1979) allows abuses such as these, as it gives sweeping powers to the executive authority in regulating various stages of the electoral process including nominating candidates, campaigning, and announcing election results.

The Muslim Brotherhood put forward roughly 5,000 members to compete for some 53,000 seats at the different levels of local elections (village, district, governorate), of whom only 500 were able to register. Meanwhile, opposition parties put forward some 4,000 candidates (1,700 from the liberal al-Wafd, 600 from the leftist Tagammu', and 700 from the liberal al-Ghad), of whom only 1,200 successfully registered.

Another notable aspect of the candidate registration process was the tough competition among members of the ruling NDP to enter the elections, with a number of districts witnessing intense contests between those desiring to be candidates under the party's banner. Some 600 NDP members resigned in protest, a scene replicating what has taken place in the party before legislative elections in recent years.

This year's local elections are more important than those of the past for several reasons. They are the first local elections to take place under the constitutional amendments passed in March 2007. Specifically, Article 76 stipulates that any independent candidate wishing to compete for the presidency must obtain the support of 140 members of the locally elected councils (ten from each of the fourteen governorates' councils) in addition to the support of no fewer than ninety members of the Egyptian parliament (sixty-five from the People's Assembly and twenty-five from the Shura Council). With its eighty-eight deputies in the People's Assembly, the Brotherhood—if it won more than 140 local seats—would lack only the Shura Council seats to be within shooting distance of getting a candidate on the presidential ballot.

The ruling establishment also has other reasons to try to prevent increased opposition representation. Corruption in local government has reached unprecedented levels, as government officials have acknowledged, creating fears in the NDP that misdeeds over the past three decades might be exposed if increased oversight was instituted. In addition, the NDP will shortly propose a new decentralization law giving more authority to local governments. This created fears in the ruling party that another political force, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, could use these new prerogatives to expand its political capacity. This fear is unrealistic; however, consider the enormous power that presidentially-appointed provincial governors will continue to exercise over local administration.

Although there is actually little power being contested in the local elections, the prevailing political climate has added some spice to the campaign, revealing the fierce struggle between the Brotherhood and the regime, each determined to show its strength in facing down its opponent. The Brotherhood for its part decided to take part in the elections in order to challenge the constitutional amendment that bans any political activity based on religion. Meanwhile, the regime decided to punish the Brotherhood using all legal and security means—including the arrest of as many as one thousand members—in order to deny it political gains.

Apart from this ongoing struggle between the regime and the Brotherhood, there are other discouraging aspects of the local elections so far. Very few women and Coptic Christian candidates are participating. The judiciary, whose role was diminished in the constitutional amendments, is playing far less of an oversight role than it has in the past. And there is much less coordination between the Brotherhood and other opposition groups, compared to what happened during the 2005 legislative elections. In short, instead of being a step forward toward consolidating the values of political participation and competition, the local elections represent a step backwards and raise serious questions about where Egypt is headed.

*Khalil al-Anani is an Egyptian scholar specializing in democratic affairs and political Islam. He recently published *Al-Ikhwan al-muslimin fi misr: al-shaykhshukha tusaari' al-zaman* (The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: A Gerontocracy Fighting the Clock) (Dar al-Shuruq al-Dawliya, 2007). Paul Wulfsberg translated this article from Arabic.*

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## **United States: The Bush Administration's Budget and Democracy in the Arab World**

### ***Stephen McInerney***

President George W. Bush submitted to the U.S. Congress in February his budget request for fiscal year 2009 (which runs from October 2008 to September 2009), the final such request of his eight-year tenure. This proposed budget is notable for increased funding for programs to support democracy, governance, and human rights—an apparent effort to cement the legacy of Bush's "freedom agenda" during his final year in office.

Throughout his two terms, President Bush has rhetorically stressed the importance of supporting democracy and human rights abroad, particularly in the Middle East. But policy has not always matched rhetoric, and his administration has come under fire for focusing too heavily on changing the region through military force in Iraq rather than utilizing the nonviolent policy tools available for supporting democracy. In last year's budget, many were disappointed to see small decreases in funding for democracy-related programs in Middle Eastern countries.

But Bush's latest and final budget request—unlike the one that preceded it—goes a long way toward living up to promises of prioritizing support for democracy abroad. Requested funds for programs in the Arab world that fall under the State Department heading of "Governing Justly and Democratically" were tripled to \$390 million from last year's appropriated level of \$132 million. While much of the increase (\$193 million) will go to programs in Iraq, the new request still increases funding to programs for the remaining Arab countries by more than 50 percent. The request includes significant increases for such programs in Mauritania, Morocco, the West Bank and Gaza, Yemen, and Algeria, and for all four programmatic areas: rule of law and human rights, good governance, political competition and consensus building, and civil society.

In addition to expanded funding for country-specific programs, the Bush administration is requesting a 75 percent increase for the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), from \$50 million to nearly \$87 million. This includes \$42 million for governance programs, \$16 million for education, and \$28.5 million for economic development. Particular areas of emphasis include MEPI's small grants program for local civil society organizations and youth-targeted programming across the region. Syria, the only Arab country for which no direct funds are requested, is singled out as a country of particular focus for MEPI, which promises to "work to strengthen the fledgling civil society movement and democracy activists in Syria."

Despite the increases, there are still causes for concern in the budget request. All programs for democracy, governance, and civil society in Tunisia—a state whose autocratic leader recently celebrated twenty years in power and where freedoms have been increasingly curtailed—have been cut. Funding requests for democracy and governance programs in Lebanon were reduced across the board, despite the threat of the ongoing political crisis there. And military funding to authoritarian leaders with no strings attached still constitutes the largest sector of assistance headed to the region. But despite these weaknesses, the budget certainly represents a broad expansion of funding for a variety of programs for supporting democracy.

So, why the widespread increases? After peaking with the so-called "Arab spring" of 2005, President Bush's "freedom agenda" is widely perceived to have faltered and taken a back seat to other policy goals. This budget may be viewed as a final attempt to revive what was formerly seen as a cornerstone of Bush administration policy, to cement the freedom

agenda as a key part of Bush's legacy. Additionally, as the administration has encountered increasing resistance from autocratic allies, the budget may represent a deliberate shift toward supporting democracy using less confrontational means. Finally, Bush administration officials have expressed concern that the next administration may reverse course on democracy promotion; funding increases may be an attempt to institutionalize programs before leaving office.

It is also important to remember that the new budget request is still a long way from approval by Congress, which controls the purse strings. Over the next few months, Congress will debate and allocate funding for various programs for fiscal year 2009, deciding where to match the numbers in President Bush's request and where to deviate from them. And there are rumors on Capitol Hill that the Democrat-controlled Congress may attempt to delay the passing of the annual appropriations bills for fiscal year 2009 until January 2009, when they could give the bills to the newly-elected president to be signed into law. Nonetheless, democracy advocates in either party can find much to like in this budget proposal, which seems to have real potential for bipartisan support.

*Stephen McInerney is the director of advocacy for the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED).*

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## **Europe/Arab States: Whither Sarkozy's Mediterranean Union?**

**George Joffé**

It is no secret that the European Union's policies toward the Mediterranean basin are in deep trouble. The Barcelona Process (officially the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership) conceived in 1995 as a means of minimizing migration and external threat by creating a zone of "shared peace, prosperity and stability," has run aground on the region's intractable political and economic problems. The European Neighborhood Policy, introduced in 2003 to engage Southern Mediterranean states bilaterally with the promise of closer economic links to the EU, has accomplished little. Few believe that the two combined policies will effectively address the ever-increasing flood of migration, as North African countries change from sources of migrants into transit points for sub-Saharan Africans desperate to get into Europe. As a result, Europe is becoming the security fortress that its policies were originally designed to avoid.

The other consequence has been an increasingly frenetic search for alternative policies, such as French President Nicolas Sarkozy's proposal for a Mediterranean Union. Initially conceived by presidential advisor Henri Guaino as a means of restoring France's leading position in Europe and the Mediterranean, the idea emerged during an election rally at Tours in February 2007. The initial proposal seemed to restate an older French idea to treat the Southern Mediterranean separately from the Eastern so as to obviate problems related to Israel and Palestine; it also reasserted France's engagement with its former colonies. Since then the proposal has mutated several times.

French officials claim that three broad ideas have informed the proposal. First, Europe's future is embedded in the South because that is the source of real security threats—strategic conflict, economic failure and the "clash of civilizations." Second, the Mediterranean is the historic focus of European culture, and thus its revival is linked to a European revival. Third, the Barcelona Process has failed because of a lack of European and private sector engagement, together with Southern resentment of European hegemony. The French claim that, despite early suspicions (particularly in London), the project was not an attempt to block Turkey's accession to the EU. Rather, France was encouraging other states to offer projects with only one concrete element: shared policies on the management of migration.

Despite the clarity of the proposal's real purpose—to engage Southern states in a securitized view of migration—the vagueness of the French concept has meant that it is now constantly evolving as other states respond. Morocco and Tunisia have been enthusiastic participants and even Algeria is cautiously warming toward it. It is European states that have been opposed. Initially Spain and Italy were hostile until a meeting between President Sarkozy, Italian premier Romano Prodi, and Spanish leader Jean-Luis Zapatero in Rome in December 2007 resolved their differences, largely because the French leader clarified that the new Union would not be a replacement for the Barcelona Process or European Neighborhood Policy.

Instead Sarkozy proposed that the Mediterranean Union would have a minimal bureaucracy, operating under a dual presidency from the South and the North to ensure equality, and would administer projects proposed by its members. A group of ten states would act as Sherpas to develop project proposals, including a separate financing agency that would seek public and private funding. These arrangements would then be discussed and adopted when Mediterranean littoral countries meet in Paris on July 13, 2008.

But opposition to the proposal, spearheaded by the European Commission, Germany, Balkan and Baltic states that resent apparent French meddling with settled EU policies, has led to a further watering-down of its content. On March 3 the French president and the German chancellor met to restore the damaged Franco-German relationship which is at the heart of the

EU. Germany was resistant to suggestions that the new initiative would mirror the Baltic Council, which involves EU and non-EU Baltic states. As a result, the proposed Mediterranean Union has undergone yet further mutation. Now it will involve all EU member-states, who will meet with the Southern Mediterranean states on July 13, presumably to discuss detailed plans for this new version.

This, of course, is to completely abandon the original principles upon which the Mediterranean Union was premised—namely that it should be the possession of the Mediterranean littoral states alone, led by France. It will retain its dual presidency and will meet formally once every two years. Presumably, it will also retain its project-management agenda. In other words, the Union that began as an exclusively Mediterranean club is now, in terms of membership, coterminous with the Barcelona Process. It is to offer genuine equality to all member-states, and thus the principles of conditionality inherent in Barcelona will be excluded.

No one knows whether Germany—for it seems to be Germany now that has determined the content of the modified proposal—intends for the proposed Mediterranean Union to be absorbed into the Barcelona Process or for it to be used to revitalize the Process somehow. It could even simply become a talking shop similar to the “five-plus-five” group, now expanded to the “six-plus-six” by the inclusion of Greece and Egypt.

Little remains, in short, of the original French proposal. European discipline has been restored; quite where that leaves the Franco-German relationship is another matter.

*George Joffé is a research fellow at the Centre of International Studies, University of Cambridge.*

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## **Morocco: Is the Electoral System Unfair?**

***Michael Meyer-Resende***

In looking at the September 2007 elections to Morocco's lower house of parliament, foreign observers agreed on two principal conclusions: the elections were conducted freely and fairly, but the election system itself was unfair, not allowing the emergence of any strong party. But are these conclusions justified? Morocco's elections are certainly more competitive and open than many other polls in the region and no party has alleged that the results were completely manipulated. There is a large area, however, between completely manipulated and genuinely democratic contestation—and the Moroccan elections fell somewhere in that gray zone.

Regarding the conduct of the elections, the preliminary findings by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) state that “overall, the voting went smoothly and was characterized by a spirit of transparency and professionalism.” Meanwhile the local observer network *Collectif Associatif* was more circumspect, voicing concerns about vote buying and bias among election officials in some cases. Several political parties also alleged vote buying and inaccurate counting and aggregation of results. Given these concerns, the question is how the Moroccan system deals with appeals. The NDI mission left shortly after election day and thus could not comment on counting, aggregation and publication of results, or complaints and appeals; the statement recognized that a final evaluation of the elections could only be made once all appeals have been dealt with. Some 400 appeals have been lodged with the Constitutional Council against results in specific electoral districts, sixteen of them by the largest opposition party, the Islamic Party of Justice and Development. Following the 2002 elections the Constitutional Council took two years to decide on election appeals. Such delays fail to provide an effective remedy, and elections without effective remedies suffer from a serious flaw.

When it comes to the electoral system, the conventional wisdom among journalists and scholars is that it is engineered to prevent any single political party from emerging with a majority. While it is true that there are many parties in the Moroccan Parliament and none holds more than 15 percent of the seats, this is not primarily an outcome of the election system. The fragmentation is primarily a reflection of the political landscape and voting results. In September's elections no single party won more than 11 percent of the vote.

Morocco is divided into ninety-five electoral districts with two to five seats each. It is thus a proportional system with a very low district magnitude. Generally, small districts favor large parties. Where only two seats can be won, a small party stands little chance of winning one of them. The effects can be seen in the Moroccan elections; all large parties gained a higher share of seats than votes, as shown in Democracy Reporting International's assessment of the elections. While such a system can result in the best-scoring party being checked by the second largest (but possibly much smaller) party, it can also result in a leading party sweeping the polls. Everything depends on local voting patterns. Thus in order for the Moroccan government to use this system in a manipulative way, it would need to have very accurate predictions of outcomes in each constituency and adjust the districts accordingly.

If it is not the proportional system, then it is the votes/seat allocation formula that observers often blame for the fragmentation of Morocco's parliament. It is true that the method used in Morocco, which allocates leftover seats according to parties' relative proportions of the vote, tends to favor smaller parties more than alternative methods do. Taken together, however, its various effects make the outcome more proportional, thereby balancing out the impact of low district magnitude, which tends to favor large parties, to some degree. Proportional election systems by definition do not easily allow one party to become overwhelmingly strong. In fact many people regard proportional election systems as more fair in terms of representation.

The fragmentation of Moroccan politics must therefore have causes other than the electoral system. There are many possibilities, including a history of royal intervention and royal creation of parties and the strong role of local notables, who often do not care under which party's name they enter parliament. In retrospect, therefore, a second look at Morocco's parliamentary elections shows that while the conduct of the elections was not as good as reported, the election system also is not as bad as is generally believed.

*Michael Meyer-Resende is the coordinator of Democracy Reporting International ([www.democracy-reporting.org](http://www.democracy-reporting.org)).*

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## Readers React

Mouin Rabbani rightly identifies 2008 as a critical year for Fatah's political future in his recent [article](#) (March 2008), but he overstates the argument that "it is finished as a movement" if it fails to hold its 6th General Conference in the coming months. Holding the Conference is certainly a critical event for Fatah to redefine and restructure itself in the post-Arafat era. But even under the best of circumstances, the 6th Conference alone is unlikely to overhaul the movement's leadership, which will do everything possible to preserve its authority.

The more significant sign of Fatah's reform will be whether the movement can complete the process of internal elections in the West Bank and Gaza initiated in 2007. These elections have provided legitimacy to hundreds of younger Fatah leaders in their communities. And while few people took the elections seriously last summer, enough of these contests have now proceeded so that initial skeptics have consented to the process. Unfortunately, the elections once again appear to be stalled, with violence disrupting the most recent attempt to hold Jerusalem's regional contest. If Fatah can manage to complete the internal elections, it will represent the most significant step to date toward renewing and legitimizing the movement's leadership. Moreover, it will provide those who have been elected with the leverage necessary to make the 6th Conference more representative and meaningful, whenever it may be held.

*Ben Fishman  
Research associate, Washington Institute for Near East Policy*

Send your views on what you have read in the *Arab Reform Bulletin* to the editor at [arb@carnegieendowment.org](mailto:arb@carnegieendowment.org).

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## News and Views

### Arab States: Arab League Summit

The [Arab League](#) held its twentieth annual leaders' summit in Damascus on March 29-30. The summit's [final statement](#) expressed concern about "rising Islamophobia around the world," called on Lebanon to elect a consensus president, and re-endorsed an [Arab initiative](#) for peace with Israel. The Saudi-led initiative, which offers normalization of relations with Israel if it withdraws from occupied Arab territories, was first adopted in the 2002 summit in Beirut. Half the leaders of the 22-member Arab League, including those of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, did not attend the Damascus summit, blaming Syria for Lebanon's protracted crisis. The leaders agreed on Doha as the venue for their 2009 summit. Click [here](#) for the leaders' speeches in Arabic.

### Egypt: Bread Crisis; Editor Convicted; Ayman Nour to Remain in Prison

On March 16, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak ordered the army to boost bread production and distribution to cope with a recent bread crisis that has sparked unrest leading to two reported deaths. Demand for subsidized bread has gone up steadily in recent months, fueled by increasing commodity prices that have made unsubsidized bread less affordable for

the 50 percent of the population living below the poverty line. At the same time, the supply has declined as subsidized bakeries have allegedly sold some of their flour; out of the 20,000 tons of flour supplied to bakeries daily, an estimated 4,000 tons are sold on the black market. Click [here](#) for more information.

On March 12, state security forces raided the home of Abduljalil al-Sharnouby, editor in chief of the [IkhwanOnline](#) web site—the official site of the Muslim Brotherhood—over coverage of the upcoming municipal elections, and confiscated books, papers, and other belongings. Click [here](#) for more information.

A Cairo court sentenced Ibrahim Eissa, editor of *al-Dustur* newspaper, to six months in prison on March 26 for printing rumors about President Hosni Mubarak's health deemed "likely to disturb public security and harm the country's economy." Eissa posted bail to avoid imprisonment until appeal. At least eight journalists have been sentenced to prison for press-related offenses since September 2007. The Committee to Protect Journalists designated Egypt as one of the worst [backsliders](#) on press freedom, citing an increase in the number of legal and physical attacks on the press. Click [here](#) for more information.

Thousands of Egyptian university lecturers held a nationwide strike on March 23 demanding salary increases and better pensions. Lecturers are demanding a doubling of their salaries, currently approximately 2,000 Egyptian pounds (U.S. \$365) per month. The country has been hit by a wave of labor strikes and demonstrations in recent months in the face of inflation. Click [here](#) for more information.

On March 17, Cairo's Supreme Administrative Court rejected a bid to free jailed opposition politician Ayman Nour on health grounds. Nour was sentenced to five years in prison on December 24, 2005, on charges of forging documents. Nour's lawyer issued a plea to President Mubarak to pardon the one-time presidential contender. Click [here](#) for more information.

On March 4, the Bush administration released \$100 million in military aid to Egypt, waiving Congressionally-imposed restrictions on "national security grounds." The 2008 appropriations bill passed by Congress in December 2008 withheld \$100 million of a \$1.3 billion military aid package to Egypt until the administration certified Egypt had done enough to protect the independence of the judiciary, curb police abuses and put a stop to arms smuggling to Gaza. Freedom House issued a [statement](#) on March 20 expressing disappointment at the administration's decision.

#### **Lebanon: Presidential Vote Delayed; Tenth Hariri Investigation Report**

On March 25, the Lebanese parliament postponed for the fifteenth time the session to elect a new president. It is now scheduled for April 22. The Western-backed ruling coalition and the pro-Syria opposition led by Hizbollah remain unable to agree on the makeup of a new government. Lebanon has been without a head of state since November 2007, when Syrian-backed Emile Lahoud stepped down at the end of his term.

The UN International Independent Investigation Commission looking into the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri and other political killings in Lebanon submitted its tenth interim [report](#) to the UN Security Council on March 28. The Commission indicated it has evidence that a network of individuals acted in concert to carry out the assassination of al-Hariri and that this same network, or parts of it, is linked to other political killings in Lebanon. The report did not name any suspects. In addition to the Hariri case, the UN Commission is mandated to assist Lebanese authorities probe twenty attacks against anti-Syrian targets in Lebanon.

#### **Palestine: Peace Process; Fatah-Hamas Dialogue; Journalist Arrested**

Israelis and Palestinians agreed on March 30 to a series of steps including an Israeli pledge to remove fifty roadblocks, upgrade checkpoints to speed up the movement of Palestinians through the West Bank, and give Palestinians more security responsibility in the town of Jenin. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, visiting the region for the second time this month in the hopes of energizing the faltering talks, [said](#) the moves "constitute a very good start to improving" a Palestinian economy crippled by the Israeli restrictions. Meanwhile, Jerusalem authorities announced on March 31 plans to expand an Israeli settlement in East Jerusalem, adding 600 new housing units. The Israel-based activist group [Peace Now](#) reports that expansions in 101 Israeli settlements in the West Bank are currently underway.

Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal [invited](#) Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to Gaza on March 31 for unconditional talks. Fatah and Hamas reached a Yemeni-brokered deal on March 23 to open their first direct talks since the 2006 Hamas takeover of Gaza. The "[Sanaa Declaration](#)," signed by Fatah and Hamas representatives, calls for talks between the two parties and a "return of the Palestinian situation to what it was before the events in Gaza." Recent [media reports](#) cite criticisms by some Fatah leaders of the declaration and Fatah-Hamas disagreements over its interpretation.

Palestinian Authority security forces in the West Bank arrested Amer Nawaf of the Ramattan News Agency in Ramallah on March 12, accusing him of being a member of Hamas. Nawaf was freed the next day without being charged. Since the

Hamas-Fatah split in June 2007, dozens of journalists have been subject to brief detention and interrogation in Gaza and the West Bank. Click [here](#) for more information.

### **Syria: Journalist Trial; Attack on Kurdish Celebration**

On March 15, a military tribunal adjourned the trial of journalist Mazen Darwish, head of the Syrian Center for Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression, until April 15. Darwish is accused of "slandering and defaming state bodies" for publishing a report about January 2008 riots in Damascus and criticizing the failure of the security bodies to protect the citizens killed in the riots. Arrested on January 12 while covering the riots, Darwish was released three days later. Click [here](#) for more information.

A March 24 Human Rights Watch [statement](#) called on Syrian authorities to investigate the March 20 shooting of three Syrian Kurds by security forces in the northern town of Qamishli during a celebration of the Persian new year, Nowruz. Syrian authorities have not issued an official statement on the incident, but Syrian forces have used force in the past to break up Kurdish cultural celebrations. In March 2006, security officers arrested dozens of Kurds and used teargas and batons to stop a candle-lit procession on Nowruz.

### **Jordan: Journalists Sentenced to Prison; Restrictions on Internet Cafés**

On March 16, an Amman court sentenced five journalists to three months in prison each in two separate cases. In the first case, two of Jordan's main daily newspapers, *al-Dustur* and *al-Arab al-Yawm*, were found in contempt of the judiciary for publishing a news item about a lawsuit filed by a Jordanian disputing a court decision to deprive him of his citizenship. The court handed prison sentences to Usama Sharif and Fayez al-Lawzi of *al-Dustur*, and Taher al-Adwan and Sahar al-Qasem of *al-Arab al-Yawm*. In the second case, a court convicted satirical writer Abdul Hadi Raji Majali of slander for an article about the Higher Media Council. Click [here](#) for more information.

The Jordanian Ministry of Interior issued new instructions for monitoring internet cafés on March 9. The new instructions oblige café owners to install cameras to monitor internet users, register their personal information, and record data on the websites visited. The instructions also mandate installing a censorship program to prevent access to websites containing pornographic material, insulting religious beliefs, or promoting the use of drugs or tobacco. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information denounced the decision, calling it a violation of rights to use the Internet and exchange information. Click [here](#) for more information.

A Jordanian court sentenced a Palestinian-born Frenchman to three months in jail on March 12 for slandering Jordan's King Abdullah. The man pleaded guilty and was initially sentenced to a year in jail by the state security court, which later reduced the penalty because he was a foreigner. Punishment for defaming the King can be up to three years in prison. Click [here](#) for more information.

### **Iraq: Attacks on Journalists**

Iraqi media executive Qassem Abdul Hussein al-Eqabi was shot by an unknown gunman on March 13 in Baghdad's largely Shi'i Karradah neighborhood. Al-Eqabi was the head of public relations and distribution for the local political daily newspaper *al-Muwatin*. According to the Iraqi Union of Journalists, this death brings the total number of Iraqi journalists killed since the U.S.-led invasion in March 2003 to 272. Click [here](#) for more information.

Editor Mohammed Saleh Hajji Taha of the Kurdish daily *Rahsen*, was freed on bail three days after his March 16 arrest for writing articles criticizing the penal code of Iraq. No date has been set for his trial.

### **Kuwait: Cabinet Resigns; Parliament Dissolved; Two Ex-MPs Detained**

Kuwait's Amir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah announced on March 19 his decision to dissolve the parliament, citing its "irresponsible conduct." New elections will be held on May 17. The decision followed the resignation of the cabinet on March 17, less than a year after it was sworn in, complaining of a lack of cooperation by the national assembly. The cabinet resignation left Sheikh Sabah with two options under the constitution: to order the formation of a new cabinet or to dissolve the parliament and call for new elections within two months. A continuing government-parliament standoff has paralyzed political life in Kuwait and delayed key economic development projects. This is the fifth time the parliament has been dissolved since it was set up in 1963. Sheikh Sabah's predecessors suspended parliamentary life from 1976-81 and 1986-92.

On March 26, Kuwaiti police used tear gas to disperse hundreds of tribesmen protesting the arrest of eight men for organizing an illegal form of primary elections. The eight men from Kuwait's major Bedouin tribes were remanded in police custody after interrogation about their role in organizing tribal elections banned by law. Kuwaiti tribes often resort to primary elections in a bid to field a small number of candidates to boost their chances of winning seats in parliament.

Former Shi'i MPs Abdulmohsen Jamal and Nasser Sorkhouh were released on a 10,000 dinar bail (U.S. \$37,855) on March 25, after being arrested and interrogated by Kuwait's public prosecutor. The MPs had been detained since March 9 on suspicion of membership in an alleged "Kuwaiti Hizbollah." Police also arrested prominent Shi'i cleric Sheikh Hussein al-Maatuq and four other activists on the same charge. All activists denied the accusation. The public prosecutor indicated that he will press formal charges after the necessary inquiries are completed. The crackdown follows a rally last month to mourn Hizbollah military commander Imad Mughniyah, who was killed in a car bombing in Damascus.

On March 8, a Kuwait City criminal court withdrew the licenses of two weekly newspapers, *al-Abraj* and *al-Shaab*, in two separate cases. The court fined *al-Abraj* editor Mansour al-Hayni and *al-Shaab* editor Hamed Abu Yabes 9,000 Kuwaiti dinars (U.S. \$33,785) each. Al-Hayni was convicted of "besmirching the prime minister's reputation" while Yabes was convicted of publishing political articles in a newspaper licensed only to cover arts and culture. Click [here](#) for more information.

### **Saudi Arabia: King Calls for Dialogue; New Fatwa Condemns Writers**

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia [called](#) March 25 for a dialogue among monotheistic religions, including Judaism. The King said that Saudi Arabia's top clerics have given him approval to pursue his idea. He declared plans to get the opinion of Muslim leaders from other countries and asked "representatives of all the monotheistic religions to meet with their brothers in faith." The King added that he had discussed the project, which he has been mulling over for two years, with Pope Benedict XVI during his landmark visit to the Vatican late last year.

On March 14, Saudi cleric Abdul Rahman al-Barrak issued a *fatwa* calling for the trial of writers Yousef Aba al-Khail and Abdullah Bin Bejad for their "heretical articles" and their death if they do not repent. The *fatwa* came in response to recent articles in the Saudi daily *al-Riyadh* by the two writers challenging the view that adherents of other faiths are to be condemned as infidels. Click [here](#) for more information.

### **Bahrain: Minister Questioning Over Population Controversy**

Parliament members from al-Wefaq, Bahrain's largest Shi'i opposition group, presented on March 25 a request to question Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs Sheikh Ahmed Bin Ateyatallah al-Khalifa. Al-Wefaq accuses the minister of concealing information about the country's population. Opposition groups have accused the Sunni-controlled government of secretly naturalizing non-Bahraini Sunnis in a bid to alter the demographic balance of the country, which has a Shi'i majority. The Bahraini government denies the accusation. Sunni Islamists and pro-government MPs, who hold twenty-two out of forty seats in parliament, have thus far blocked al-Wefaq's attempts to question the minister.

### **Qatar: First Church**

On March 14, Qatar inaugurated its first Christian church, with five additional churches under construction. Qatar's emir, Sheikh Khalifa al-Thani, donated the land to build the \$15 million dollar church in the outskirts of the capital Doha. Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates host churches that cater to hundreds of thousands of expatriates and, in some cases, small local communities. Click [here](#) for more information.

### **UAE: First Female Judge; Labor Unrest**

The United Arab Emirates named Kholoud Ahmed al-Dhaheri as its first woman judge on March 26. The move made the UAE the second Arab country in the Gulf (after Bahrain) to appoint a female judge. The UAE cabinet includes four women. Nine women also sit on the 40-member Federal National Council, an assembly that advises the government.

Some 1,500 foreign workers in Sharjah staged a violent protest for higher wages on March 19, setting dozens of vehicles on fire and damaging property. Asian workers have demonstrated several times in the past year to demand higher wages and better living conditions despite a ban on public protests in the UAE. Many construction workers earn less than \$200 per month and are facing mounting inflation. Click [here](#) for more information.

### **Yemen: Publications Banned**

On March 14, Yemeni authorities banned the distribution of the new current affairs monthly *Abwab*. The first issue of *Abwab*, which was printed in Dubai, was seized on arrival at Sanaa airport. The magazine's editor said the cover, which showed President Ali Abdullah Saleh, was deemed to be disrespectful to the president. On March 4, the Ministry of Information ordered a ban on the newspaper *al-Sabah*, known to be critical of the government. Authorities continued censoring news websites and blocked access to the website of the [Yemeni Socialist Party](#) without explanation. Yemen is on Reporters Without Border's list of "Countries Under Surveillance" due to its internet censorship policies. Click [here](#) for more information.

### **Tunisia: Constitutional Amendment; Comedian Released**

President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali announced on March 21 that Tunisia will amend its constitution to allow more candidates to contest next year's presidential election. Leaders of any legal party, including those with no parliament seats, will be able to stand provided they were elected to the post and have held it for two consecutive years. Until now, only leaders of parties with parliamentary seats could run. Ben Ali has yet to confirm he will stand for re-election next year. Click [here](#) for more information.

Comedian Hedi Ould Baballah was released from prison on March 20, after a special pardon was issued on the occasion of Tunisia's Independence Day. Baballah was sentenced on February 4 to one year in prison and a fine of 1,000 dinars (U.S. \$800) for possession of narcotics. At the hearing, the comedian denied any knowledge of the drugs and alleged that there was a police conspiracy against him in connection with his controversial political satire. Baballah had been performing a skit in which he imitated President Ben Ali.

### **Libya: Political Prisoner Released to Hospital**

Libyan authorities transferred political dissident Fathi al-Jahmi to a hospital March 11 due to his deteriorating health. Al-Jahmi reportedly is free to see his family but not to leave the hospital. Al-Jahmi has been detained since March 2004, when he was rearrested after making comments critical of Libyan leader Qaddafi upon release from a previous term in prison. Click [here](#) for a Human Rights Watch statement on the case.

### **Algeria: Churches Shut Down; Journalist Interrogated**

On March 9, Algerian authorities ordered the closure of two Protestant churches in the Algerian city of Tizi Ouzou for alleged missionary work. Religious Affairs Minister Bu Abdullah Ghoulamullah told reporters that the churches were "trying to establish a minority, which might give foreign powers a pretext to intervene in Algeria's domestic affairs." Algerian law forbids attempts to convert Muslims to other religions and bans the production of media intended to "shake the faith of a Muslim." Algeria has ordered thirteen Protestant churches to shut down since November. Click [here](#) for more information.

### **Morocco: Journalist Fined; "Online Prince" Pardoned**

On March 25, a Rabat court convicted Rachid Nini, editor of the daily newspaper *al-Massae*, of libel and public insults, and ordered him to pay 6 million Moroccan dirhams (U.S. \$825,400) in damages and a fine of 120,000 dirhams (U.S. \$16,500) in a case brought by four deputy public prosecutors. The four deputy prosecutors sued Nini in early February, claiming they had been defamed by a November 18 report published in his newspaper. The report claimed that four unnamed officials had attended a homosexual marriage ceremony in the northern town of al-Qasr al-Kabir. Click [here](#) for more information.

On March 18, Morocco's King Mohammed issued a royal pardon releasing Fouad Mourtada, an IT engineer who had been serving a three-year jail sentence for creating a false profile on Facebook in the name of the King's brother, Moulay Rachid. Mourtada was convicted on February 22 of "modifying and falsifying information technology data and usurping an official's identity." Click [here](#) for more information.

### **Mauritania: Journalists Arrested**

On March 25, Mauritanian authorities arrested two journalists, Muhammad Salim Ould Muhammad and Sidi Ould Abdelkader, from the pro-Islamist *Assiraj* newspaper. Abdelkader was released the same day, while Muhammad remains in custody without charge. The two journalists have written articles criticizing the Mauritanian economic and political situation as well as government restrictions on the media. Click [here](#) for more information.

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### **Upcoming Political Events**

- Egypt: Local Elections, April 8, 2008
- Lebanon: Parliament will hold a session to elect a president, April 22, 2008
- Kuwait: Parliamentary Elections, May 17, 2008

### **Views from the Arab Media**

The Arab-Israeli conflict has been the subject of heated debate in the media:

- *Al-Jazeera's* "al-Ittijah al-Mu'akis" (The Opposite Direction) featured on March 23 a [debate](#) about the agreement signed by Hamas and Fatah negotiators in Yemen. Palestinian political analyst Bilal al-Hassan argued that the agreement's lack of substance accounts for conflicting interpretations by the two Palestinian sides, with Hamas and Fatah agreeing only to the opening of talks on a number of issues, without a plan for direct action. Ali al-Jarbawi, a Palestinian political science professor, emphasized the need for the Palestinian Authority to stand up to U.S. and Israeli pressure against dialogue with Hamas.
- *Al-Jazeera's* "Ma Wara al-Khabar" (Behind the News) hosted a [debate](#) on March 22 on the role of Russia in the Middle East peace process. Arab-Russian relations specialist Andre Germanovich said that Russia's ties to Syria, Israel, and Hamas make it a distinguished member of the international quartet that can play a unique role in brokering a peace deal between the Israelis and Palestinians. Egyptian professor Mahmoud Khalaf said that Russia's close relationship to Israel is not a helpful tool, and that Russia's many unresolved issues with the United States limits its role in the peace process.
- Both Israel and Hamas have strategic reasons behind their mutual attacks that differ from the explanations they express publicly, according to Egyptian writer Mustafa Aloui in a March 11 [article](#) in *al-Ahram*. Aloui argues that the main objective of Israel's attacks is to deepen the division between Fatah and Hamas so as to distract Palestinian leaders from their common enemy, whereas the principal goal governing Hamas's attacks is to attain the status of leader of the Palestinian resistance.

Other media focused on U.S. policy:

- Egyptian writer Hassan Nafi'ah questions, in a March 16 [article](#) in *al-Hayat*, the mission that George Bush assigned to Dick Cheney during the latter's recent visit to the region. Three factors concerning Cheney's trip—the Vice President's negative image as an advocate of war, his visiting so soon after Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's return, and his appearance on the fifth anniversary of the continuing Iraq War—lend support to the assumption that Cheney's visit to the Middle East signals preparations for a coming war, rather than efforts to revive peace negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis.
- In a March 8 [article](#) in the electronic daily *Elaph*, Khalid Ayid al-Janfawi contends there are many arguments for the idea that democracy would benefit both U.S. security and Arab countries' economic, political, and social prosperity. Nevertheless, the author warns that the backslide in U.S. democracy promotion, as well as Washington's undemocratic approach in foreign policy, risks creating a legacy of suspicion toward the United States and, even worse, toward the principle of democracy itself.
- Taher al-Adwan cautions Arabs not to expect U.S. president George W. Bush to accomplish any advance in the peace process during his final few months in office, in a March 6 [article](#) in Jordan's *al-Arab al-Yawm*. The author asserts that the United States has a great influence on Israel but has not used that influence thus far to lead Israel toward peace with the Palestinians. Moreover, the purpose behind the U.S. initiative in Annapolis, he argues, was to distract attention away from the Bush administration's plans concerning other Middle Eastern actors—Iran, Syria, and their allies in the region.

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## Read On

New publications on **Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict** include:

- *The Much Too Promised Land—America's Elusive Search for Arab-Israeli Peace*, by former U.S. negotiator Aaron David Miller (Random House, March, 2008).
- "Bush in Jerusalem: Rhetoric vs. Reality," by Josh Ruebner (*Middle East Report*, no. 246, Spring 2008).

- In [“Zion and the Arabs: Jaffa as a Metaphor,”](#) Adam LeBor studies the conflict through the family narratives of Israelis and Arabs living in Jaffa (*World Policy Journal*, vol. 24, no. 4, Winter 2007/08, 61-75).
- [《 Hamas in Politics: Democracy, Religion, Violence 》](#), by Jeroen Gunning (Columbia University Press, March 2008).
- [“Ruling Palestine I: Gaza Under Hamas”](#) (International Crisis Group, Middle East Report no. 73, March 19, 2008).
- [“Fayad's Reform Plan: Difficulties and Political Implications,”](#) by Mohammad Yaghi (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch no. 1353, March 12, 2008).
- In [“Fatah Embraces Islam,”](#) Ido Zerkovitz contends that Fatah, despite its secular roots, has fused national and religious symbols in order to use Islam as an instrument of mobilization (*Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 2, Spring 2008, 19-26).
- [《 Clash of Identities: Explorations in Israeli and Palestinian Societies 》](#), by Baruch Kimmerling (Columbia University Press, March 2008).
- [《 Arab-Israeli Military Forces in an Era of Asymmetric Wars 》](#), by Anthony H. Cordesman (Stanford University Press, March 2008).
- [“Weapon of Terror: Development and Impact of the Qassam Rocket,”](#) by Margaret Weiss (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch no. 1352, March 11, 2008).
- In [“A Land without a People for a People without a Land,”](#) Diane Muir contends that the often-cited Zionist slogan was neither Zionist nor popular (*Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 2, Spring 2008, 55-62).

Several new publications focus on **Iraqi politics**:

- In [“The Anbar Awakening,”](#) Austin Long discusses the prospects and perils of using tribes to provide security in Iraq (*Survival*, vol. 50, no. 2, April 2008, 67-94).
- In [“Historical Myth of a Divided Iraq,”](#) Reidar Vesser argues that dividing Iraq into three ethno-sectarian entities lacks historical resonance and is likely to increase instability (*Survival*, vol. 50, no. 2, April 2008, 95-106).
- According to Reidar Visser in [“Debating Devolution in Iraq,”](#) the Iraqi Shi'a are divided into three camps on the issue of federalism: centralists who want a strong Baghdad government, small-scale federalists, and advocates of larger ethno-sectarian regions (*Middle East Report Online*, March 12, 2008).
- [“From Gridlock to Compromise: How Three Laws Could Begin to Transform Iraqi Politics,”](#) by Jason Gluck (United States Institute of Peace, March 2008).
- [“Who Represents the Iraqi Sunnis?”](#) by Nazar Janabi (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch no. 1349, March 5, 2008).
- [“After the Surge: Toward an 18-State Federation,”](#) by Keith W. Mines (*Foreign Service Journal*, vol. 85, no. 3, March 2008).

Several recent publications discuss **the Iraq war and U.S. policies**:

- [《 The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict 》](#) by Joseph E. Stiglitz and Linda J. Bilmes (W. W. Norton, March 2008).

- [“A Bad War Gone Worse,”](#) by Simon Sirfaty (*Washington Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 2, Spring 2008, 165-79).
- [“The Iraq War and Asia: Assessing the Legacy,”](#) by Michael J. Green (*Washington Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 2, Spring 2008, 181-200).
- [“Thinking Strategically about Iraq: Report from a Symposium,”](#) by Colin H. Kahl, Brian Katulis, and Marc Lynch (*Middle East Policy Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1, Spring 2008).
- [“The Iraq War after Five Years: The Surge, Current Status, and Military Lessons,”](#) by Anthony H. Cordesman (Center for International and Strategic Studies, March 18, 2008).
- The RAND Corporation released the second volume of its study, [Counterinsurgency in Iraq \(2003-2006\)](#), by Bruce R. Pirnie and Edward O’Connell (March 11, 2008). A summary of the study, [“Conducting Counterinsurgency Operations: Lessons from Iraq \(2003-2006\),”](#) is also available.
- [“After Iraq: Future U.S. Military Posture in the Middle East,”](#) by Bradley L. Bowman (*Washington Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 2, Spring 2008, 77-91).
- [“Real Leaders Do Soft Power: Learning the Lessons of Iraq,”](#) by James B. Steinberg (*Washington Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 2, Spring 2008, 155-64).
- [Bad Days in Basra - My Turbulent Time as Britain’s Man in Southern Iraq](#), by Hilary Synnott (I.B. Tauris Publishers, April 2008).
- In [“Helping Those Who Helped Us,”](#) Shawn Zeller calls on the U.S. government to expedite immigrant visas for Iraqis who have assisted the U.S. military in Iraq (*Foreign Service Journal*, vol. 85, no. 3, March 2008).
- [“The Role of Air Power in the Iraq and Afghan Wars,”](#) by Anthony H. Cordesman (Center for International and Strategic Studies, March 19, 2008).

New publications on **Saudi Arabia** include:

- [“Precarious Justice: Arbitrary Detention and Unfair Trials in the Deficient Criminal Justice System of Saudi Arabia”](#) (Human Rights Watch, March 25, 2008). Click [here](#) for Arabic.
- [“Adults Before Their Time: Children in Saudi Arabia’s Criminal Justice System”](#) (Human Rights Watch, March 25, 2008). Click [here](#) for Arabic.
- [“Al-Qaida’s Third Front: Saudi Arabia,”](#) by Bruce Riedel and Bilal Saab (*Washington Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 2, Spring 2008, 33-46).

Recent publications on **Lebanon** include:

- In [“Shaping Lebanon’s Future,”](#) Bilal Y. Saab calls for a U.S. policy that would focus on rebuilding state capacity, shielding Lebanon from negative foreign influences, pushing for the convening of the Hariri tribunal, and pursuing regional peace (Brookings Institution, Middle East Memo no. 12, March 19, 2008).
- [“Lessons of the Israeli-Hezbollah War: A Briefing,”](#) by Anthony H. Cordesman (Center for International and Strategic Studies, March 12, 2008).
- In [“Wars and Rumors of War: The Levantine Tinderbox,”](#) Antony T. Sullivan warns that a new conflict between Hizbollah and Israel would activate al-Qaeda sleeper cells in the region, embolden Iran and Syria to destabilize Iraq,

and have a disastrous impact on U.S. national interests (*Middle East Policy Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1, Spring 2008).

Several new publications focus on **human rights** and **freedom of speech**:

- The U.S. Department of State's "[2007 Country Report on Human Rights Practices](#)" highlights positive developments in Mauritania (due to its democratic transition and recent efforts to address slavery and inequality) and Morocco (due to the elections and progress of reforms). The report says that improvements in the security situation in Iraq and Lebanon are conducive to progress despite current political obstacles. It designates two Arab countries among the world's most systematic human rights violators: Syria (due to its crackdown on political activists and support of violent extremist groups) and Sudan (due to the atrocities in Darfur). The report's introduction also criticizes Egypt (due to arrests and convictions of political activists and journalists) and Tunisia (due to arrests and harassment of journalists and civil society leaders).
- "[Hundreds of Journalists Forced into Exile in Five Years since Launch of U.S.-Led Invasion of Iraq – Fifth Anniversary of Start of War on 20 March 2003](#)," by Angelique Ferrat and Hajar Smouni (Reporters Without Borders, March 19, 2008). Click [here](#) for Arabic.
- "[Turning Promises into Reality: Reporters Without Borders Bahrain Fact-Finding Trip Report](#)" (Reporters Without Borders, March, 2008). Click [here](#) for Arabic.
- "[The Status of Democracy and Human Rights in the Middle East: Does Regime Type Make a Difference?](#)" by B. Todd Spinks (*Democratization*, vol. 15, no. 2, April 2008, 321-41).
- "[Al-Taqrir al-sanawi al-thalith: al-hurriyat al-sahafiya fi al-buldan al-'arabiya lil-am 2007](#)" (*Third Annual Report: Press Freedoms in Arab Countries 2007*), published by the Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (March 18, 2008)

Several new publications discuss **Islamist politics**:

- "[Scientific Training and Radical Islam](#)," by Stephen Schwartz (*Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 2, Spring 2008, 3-11).
- "Is al-Qaeda's Central Leadership Still Relevant?" by Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Kyle Dabruzzi (*Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 2, Spring 2008, 27-36).
- "[The Psychological Asymmetry of Islamist Warfare](#)," by Irwin J. Mansdorf and Mordechai Kedar (*Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 2, Spring 2008, 37-44).

Several publications discuss **reform-related developments in various countries**:

- "[Algeria in Limbo: Stable Now, but Still Underperforming](#)," by William B. Quandt (*Current History*, April 2008).
- "[Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement: Beyond the Crisis](#)" (International Crisis Group, Africa Briefing no. 50, March 13, 2008).
- "[Istitlaa' lil ra'i al-'am hawla hukumat dawlat al-muhandis Nader al-Dhahabi ba'da murur ma'at yawm 'ala tashkiliha](#)" (Public Opinion Survey about Nader al-Dhahabi's Government, 100 Days after its Formation), by Muhammad al-Masri (Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, March 2008).

Other new publications focus on **Arab economies**:

- In "Demographic Surprises Foreshadow Change in Neoliberal Egypt," Eric Denis argues that high population growth and urbanization rates in Egypt must be matched with pragmatic economic liberalization and structural adjustment

programs (*Middle East Report*, no. 246, Spring 2008).

- “[Arab Economies at a Tipping Point](#),” by Marcus Noland and Howard Pack (*Middle East Policy Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1, Spring 2008).
- “Gulf Cooperation Council Stock Markets since September 11,” by Sam R. Hakim (*Middle East Policy Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1, Spring 2008).
- “[Sovereign Wealth Funds: Investment Vehicles for the Persian Gulf Countries](#),” by Nimrod Raphaeli and Bianca Gersten (*Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 15, no. 2, Spring 2008, 45-53).

Other publications discuss the **impact of outside powers on the region**:

- The January issue of *al-Mustaqbal al-'arabi* (*Arab Future*), published by the Center for Arab Unity Studies in Beirut, includes analysis of the future of U.S. Middle East policy after George W. Bush and the impact of outside interferences on democratic transitions in the region.
- The March issue of *Araa'* (*Opinions*), published by the Gulf Research Center, includes a special report on U.S. policy in the Gulf region, U.S.-Arab economic relations, and U.S. public diplomacy in the Middle East.
- “Libya and the United States: A Faustian Pact?” by Anthony H. Cordesman (*Middle East Policy Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1, Spring 2008).
- *Gulf-Pakistan Strategic Relations*, by Faryal Leghari (Dubai: Gulf Research Center, March 2008).

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